

WHY ARE THOSE STOP SIGNS SO HIGH?

Traffic Engineers have received calls from concerned citizens asking, " *Aren't those new STOP signs rather high?*" The information presented below relates to STOP signs as well as most other traffic control signs.

In Iowa, as in most states, the standards for traffic control devices, including signs, signals, and pavement markings, is the [Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices](#) (MUTCD). This publication of the U.S. Department of Transportation, sets the standard for the



installation of all traffic control devices.

The MUTCD indicates that, "In business, commercial and residential districts where parking and/or pedestrian movement is likely to occur or where there are other obstructions to view, the clearance to the bottom of the sign shall be at least 7 feet." "Signs erected at the side of the road in rural districts shall be mounted at a height of at least 5 feet, measured from the bottom of the sign to the near edge of the pavement." "*Why must signs be so high?*" One major reason is that improved visibility results. In urban areas, parked cars and other obstructions often obscure signs that are too low. Also, pedestrians are less likely to collide with properly mounted signs under conditions of reduced visibility {ie: darkness}.

In rural areas, bushes and tall weeds can block signs that are installed too low. Another reason for installing signs this high, is the improved condition and increased longevity of the sign. A sign 7 feet above the ground is less susceptible to vandalism. It is also less likely to be sprayed with dirt/ mud from passing cars. Finally, signs mounted at their correct height have been found to command more respect than those that are too low.

"Why is the STOP sign so far from the road?" This is another concern expressed by citizens relating to sign placement.

The MUTCD states that, "signs should have the maximum practical lateral clearance from the edge of the traveled way for the safety of motorists who may leave the roadway and strike the sign support."

It is further stated that, "Normally, signs should not be closer than 6 feet from the edge of the shoulder, or if none, 12 feet from the edge of the traveled way. In urban areas, a lesser clearance may be used where necessary. Although 2 feet is recommended as a working urban minimum, a clearance of 1 foot from the curb face is permissible where sidewalk width is limited or where existing poles are close to the curb."

Use of these minimum lateral clearances results in signs that are less likely to be hit by errant vehicles, or those parking, or, vehicles with wide side mirrors.

These standards are followed so that the signs the city installs to guide, warn and direct drivers, remain usable through increased visibility.